ENGLISH

OPERATION VALUABLE – THE FAILED OPERATION THAT TOOK THE LIVES OF 300 ALBANIAN YOUNG MEN

MISS WORLD 2003, THE IRISH BEAUTY ROSANNA DAVISON “REVEALS” HOW 300 ALBANIAN YOUNG

MEN WERE KILLED IN THE "(IN)VALUABLE OPERATION"!

Mal Berisha:

There are events which, even if they are not mentioned often, mentioned rarely, or not mentioned at all, are nevertheless never forgotten.
One of them is the operation undertaken by the Anglo-American intelligence services, ***MI6*** *and* ***CIA****, to overthrow the communist dictatorship in Albania during the years* ***1949–1955****, coded under the name* ***Operation VALUABLE****.*
Regarding this Western failure — which, frightened by the rapidly spreading Bolshevism in Europe, used Albania as an experiment to curb a phenomenon dangerous to humanity — there are many interpretations today.

The preparation, deployment, and later execution of young Albanian men — sons of nationalist patriots — in operations that carry different names depending on Western or communist sources, constitutes one of the greatest tragedies of our nation.

Among the causes cited for this failure are:

- *the treachery of the British agent **Kim Philby**, who passed vital information to the Soviet secret service and, directly, to the regime in Tirana;*
- *the lack of readiness among the Albanian population to rise up against **Enver Hoxha's** dictatorship;*
- *the organization of the **State Security** (Sigurimi) according to the Stalinist models of that time.*

*Communist propaganda portrayed this as one of its own "victories," but in reality, it was simply the weakness and betrayal of one individual, **Kim Philby**, which brought no benefit either to the services that paid him or to Albania.*

*There is even a certain parallel between him and the present-day **FBI** official **Charles McGonigal**, who likewise brought no good to the United States, and even less to Albanian democracy.*

I do not intend to analyze in detail the events of those years, no matter how much pain I feel for the lost lives of Albanian youth. That has already been done, each in their own way, by figures such as:

- ***David Smiley**, in the book Albanian Assignment;*

• ***Lord Nicholas Bethell****, in the book The Great Betrayal;*
• ***Colonel Oakley Hill****, in the book An Englishman in Albania;*
• *and the* ***State Security (Sigurimi)****, in the propagandistic film Special Duty.*

The latter employed several renegade artists who, by playing with the blood of their fallen brothers, benefited from the communist regime — benefits that, unfortunately, are still enjoyed today by their sons and daughters, nephews and nieces.

But unlike all of these, who have written, interpreted, or manipulated this history in their own way, today I will bring before you a direct testimony: the account of a living witness, a woman who served at the ***Fort Bingemma*** *military base in Malta, where the Albanian young men were trained before being deployed into their homeland.*

This story was first documented by the Albanian-Irish journalist ***Ndrek Gjini****, after he followed the documentary Do You Know Who You Are?, produced by Irish television.*

The documentary presents an unusual revelation: its

*main character is **Miss World 2003**, an Irish woman who, while tracing her family lineage back to the year 1080, suddenly encounters a shocking fact — the involvement of her grandmother and grandfather in the Anglo-American operations in Albania during the years **1949–1955**.*

*My curiosity to bring this film to you, dear viewers, was further strengthened by my personal acquaintance with the historian **Roderick Bailey**, one of the most dedicated researchers on this topic and a participant in the documentary.*

*In 2013, I had the honor of welcoming him to the Embassy of Albania in London and, together with the **Anglo-Albanian Association**, launching his book The Wildest Province – SOE in the Land of the Eagle.*

I have written about this topic before, but today is not the moment to dwell on it.

Today is the moment to listen to the voice of the witnesses.

To see what history reveals when it is told by those who saw it with their own eyes.

Let us follow the documentary and understand how 300 Albanian young men were sent to their deaths —

victims of a secret war, lost without glory... victims of a nation under dictatorship and betrayed by renegades who, unfortunately, we still see moving through the streets and even the offices of our state today.
Enjoy the documentary.

OPERATION VALUABLE – OPERACIONI I DËSHTUAR QË MORI JETËN E 300 DJEMVE SHQIPTARË

Narrator – Rosanna Davison was the first Irish woman to be crowned Miss World in 2003.
Since winning the title, the 25-year-old has carved out a successful modeling career in Ireland and abroad.
As the daughter of a famous singer, Rosanna is used to the spotlight.
But has now decided to cast it on her ancestors to see if fame and notoriety are a family trait.

Rosanna Davison – At the moment, I do know very little beyond my grandparents.
I will hopefully be surprised by what I learn in the days to come.

Roderick Beiley – Finally, you have this letter at the end here, which is written by your grandmother.

Rosanna Davison – And now the writing is so well.

Roderick Beiley – And it says that he's no longer interested in obtaining a Short Service Commission, as he's accepted another post and has left the country. I'm not—I'm not… that sounds quite intriguing, because that's the end of the file.

Rosanna Davison – Yeah!

Roderick Beiley – And it might be interesting to find out what that post was?

Rosanna Davison – Hi Granny, how are you?

Granny – Ohhh, yeah! How are you?

Rosanna Davison – We just read a letter written by you, and we were just wondering why — why you couldn't take the post, and where he actually went instead of going to Malaya.

Granny – Well — he was offered a posting in Malta.

Rosanna Davison – And what sort of work would that have been involved?

Granny – Well — it was official army work, but in fact there was some intelligence work.
He was training agents to be put into Albania.

Rosanna Davison – Wow, so it was again highly secret…

Granny – And he was teaching them how to blow things up, and generally cause lots of disruption.

Rosanna Davison - And what were you doing then?

Granny – I used to go with him to this base where we did the training, and I did all the coding and decoding when the agents were being dropped at night in Albania.
I used to be up there all night, ready to take messages and send them out to London.

Rosanna Davison – Granny, that's an aspect of your life I never knew about.
You never told me this. How you just pretended you were some sheep farmer or horse breeder.
I never knew that. I'm very, very impressed.

Granny – I've had lots of excitement in my life, oh yeah, that's why I so much enjoy a peaceful life nowadays.

Rosanna Davison – So, you heard that conversation?

Roderick Beiley – Yes, it is—it's…

Rosanna Davison – What would you make of it?

Roderick Beiley – Well, it can mean only one thing. It's a highly secret and controversial operation. One of the first Cold War attempts to destabilize a communist government anywhere in the world. And it was run jointly by MI6 and the CIA. And the operation was to parachute and infiltrate Albanian exiles into Albania in a way to hopefully overthrow the government.
These sorts of operations are secret for a very, very long time.

Narrator – After World War II, Soviet influence began to spread throughout Eastern Europe, causing great concern to the West. Albania became one of the most hardline new communist states under the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha. But Rosanna has just learned that her grandparents were sent to

Malta as part of Operation VALUABLE, a joint British and American plan to undermine and overthrow the communist Albanian regime. Rosanna has flown to Malta, furious about her grandfather's secret posting here on the island.

Local historian Mario Felucia has been trying to unearth some more details for her.

Rosanna Davison – Do you have any more memories about what they were doing and why they were here?

Mario Felucia – Given the information we have, is that they were trained at Fort Bingemma.
However, they could also have been trained at Fort Manuel.
And that's because these are the same old bases that were used by the SOE during the Second World War.

Rosanna Davison – Is there anybody else who has this information?

Mario Felucia – No, unfortunately we haven't found anyone.
In fact, we've also run an ad in the papers, and no one would come forward.
I think it was so top secret.

Rosanna Davison – Yeah.

Mario Felucia – There are very few local people in particular who have been involved.
What I can provide you with is this book, which is about *The ALBANIAN ASSIGNMENT*.

Rosanna Davison – OK!

Mario Felucia – And it gives you some background about, you know, what these operations entail. What we know for sure is that all the activity — that is, the training activity — took place around those places, at Fort Bingemma and possibly also Fort Manuel. For the gentleman in particular, it is very isolated. It is in the north-northwest of the island, which is one of the farthest points on the island.
And then you take a track!

Rosanna Davison – I'm at a point now where I've got a certain amount of information and a location on where my grandparents, you know, were based during the early 1950s.
And, but I feel like we're sort of on the cusp of something.
So it's incredibly exciting and thrilling.
And for me to think that we've come this far and there's still all this information to find out…!

I think this could be yours.
Hi there, is this… is this Fort Bingemma?

A local resident – Yes, this is Fort Bingemma!

Rosanna Davison – Then I'm in the right place. Well, my name is Rosanna.

A local resident – My name is Salzano.

Rosanna Davison – Nice to meet you!

Rosanna Davison – I was just wondering, how do you remember this fort from, say, around the time of the Cold War, from the late 1940s?

A local resident – So I was too young to dig into what was happening here?

Rosanna Davison – That's such a pretty… I mean, I'd love to come in and have a look at your place.

A local resident – Yes, come and have a look around!

Rosanna Davison – Thank you.

Narrator – Almost 60 years ago, this is where Rosanna's grandparents helped to train young Albanian men to try to overthrow communism.

Rosanna Davison – It's amazing to think that this is where my grandparents probably would have stood.

Narrator – Operation VALUABLE was highly secret.
Even today, no official records are available to historians.
But Colonel David Smiley, who supervised the project in Malta, wrote briefly about the operation in his book *The Albanian Assignment*:
"First, accommodation for the Albanians had to be found, and then their cover had to be invented. Fort Bingemma, built during the Napoleonic Wars, fitted the bill.
It could be approached only by a rough track."

Rosanna Davison – "This is very interesting.
He goes: 'As all my signals to and from London had to be in code, I needed a cipher clerk.
So my wife Moy, in Malta, was responsible for all the cipher work of the force.'
And that sounds exactly the same as what my grandmother described she was doing."

Rosanna Davison – Now this is interesting.
I think I've discovered a sort of anomaly to the story.

Rosanna Davison – He goes: “Once all the groups have been put ashore, the station at Malta closed down, and I moved to Greece.”
Now that’s very strange, because my grandfather actually accepted this post, and this place did not shut down.
It continued.
So, I’m not sure, but that may just point to the absolute secrecy of this force.

My granny has been a major dark horse, and I always knew that she was a highly intelligent woman.
But I had no idea that she was really so deeply involved in something like this.

You know, I’ve made a decision now to spend a lot of time with her this summer, and just… just was talking about us.
You know, I’m not going to make the same mistake with her that I made with grandpa.

Narrator – Why Rosanna has been retracing her grandparents’ secret past in Malta.
Roderick Bailey has been uncovering more about Operation VALUABLE.
It does seem that Rosanna’s grandmother’s

information has rewritten history.
Operation VALUABLE didn't end when Colonel David Smiley left Malta.
The covert training continued under Charles Davison.
He arrived in Malta just at the time when generally it's thought that the operation came to an end.

Roderick Bailey – Your grandfather's role, as you know, was to train these young Albanians, and he was perfect for doing the job.
And he would also be teaching them how to use radios, how to kill, how to lay explosives, and so on.
These are all the things that, of course, he learned during the war.
So, he was very experienced at that kind of activity.
He was very skilled!

Roderick Beiley – Yeah, absolutely.
And when the training finished, they would have taken the agents away from Fort Bingemma and sent them into Albania by two ways.
One was over land through Greece, but another way was by boat.
And they would have been taken by boat from Malta, from one of these docks here, and taken across to the Albanian coast, and dumped off in the middle of the night.

Now, there's one other thing that you should know about this whole operation, and that is the fact that it was a complete disaster, pretty much from start to finish.

Rosanna Davison – Really?

Roderick Beiley – And that the Albanians themselves, the young Albanians you were training at the Fort Bingemma you visited, a great many of them were caught, and they were also tortured and executed.
Some of them did manage to get away.
Some did make it back here, yeah.

Roderick Beiley – But they told terrible stories of what it was like in the country.
That there was no… there was very little chance of any sort of success.
The communist security was very, very tight.
But it wasn't the fault of the British trainers at all.
The whole enterprise was… it was flawed.

Rosanna Davison – Do you know pinpoints of certain issues?

Roderick Beiley – Yes. They overestimated the ability of Albanian communities to rise against the communist government.
And also, it's generally thought that a British double

agent was at work, exactly called Kim Philby, who was working in Washington at the time,
and it's thought that he passed secrets to the communists.

Narrator – Despite Rosanna's father's best efforts, all his work was undone.
The utter secrecy of Operation VALUABLE was undermined by a mole, which meant the communist regime in Albania was waiting for the insurgents.
The failure of Operation VALUABLE led to the death of at least 300 men.
To this day, it is one of the least-known operations of the Cold War.

Rosanna Davison – It doesn't change my attitude necessarily towards my grandparents and what they did.
I'm disappointed for them, you know.
I'm sort of trying to empathize with her… very much… in that they sort of implicated so many lives, and they were responsible to some degree for the loss of so many Albanian lives.

Roderick Beiley – It's uncomfortable to talk about, because it did turn out to be a disaster.

Rosanna Davison – The information I have, um, put together mentally in my head…
So I had—my grandfather said to me, okay, anything he puts his, you know, full confidence into, and his full ability into, will be guaranteed success.
You know, I really, up until now, believed in everything he could do—he could pull off and be wonderful at.
So it's a bit of a jolt to the system, really.
I suppose I'm feeling their loss and their disappointment as much too.

Narrator – Tracing her family tree has taken Rosanna far and wide,
but finally it brings her back to Ireland, where her search began, at her grandmother's, in Wexford.

Rosanna Davison – Yeah, were you still used to using and keeping this information secret, that you just got to not talking about it, or could you have openly talked about it to anyone else?

Granny – Of course you couldn't speak for many years, you know, because you had to have signed the Official Secrets Act, and it kept you quiet.

Rosanna Davison – How did you disguise what you were doing there?

Granny – You just lived in a very ordinary way.
You didn't have to hide; children went to an army school, a little army school.
We used to wait for news coming from…

Rosanna Davison – Was it very much a night-time?

Granny – The training went on during the day.
The landings were night-time, but the training went on during the daytime.

Rosanna Davison – Well, when you left Malta, I mean, were you anxious to know the outcome of the operation?

Granny – I mean, you really were not told, and it was the surrounding things that might have happened.

Rosanna Davison – Because we discovered, you know, over there, that it actually was a bit of a disaster, that a lot of the Albanians died.

Granny – Yes, I'm afraid they… not died.
It is very sad to hear that.

Rosanna Davison – How did you deal with that?

Granny – I was disappointed that it was over.
But sorry… it really… very sorry that it should have ended as it did.

Rosanna Davison - Were you upset so the operation didn't actually succeed it?

Granny – Yes, we were upset that there's nothing we could do about it, yeah.
It was sad because they were nice young fellows.

Rosanna Davison – I mean, I've… I have never knew about this.
I suppose I haven't ever questioned, you know, about your life.

Granny – You never asked me, you know.
I think you always find that other people have all sorts of amazing memories, almost everybody.

Rosanna Davison – I suppose one of the most crucial resources for this whole trip — this whole trip, understanding this whole journey of discovery — has been a part of my life forever.
It's been, you know, my grandmother, this person who I've always admired, and I know I've always thought the world of.
But she's been here with all this information… my… I never thought of asking her.